March 6, 2018

S.B. No. 359 (RAISED) AN ACT PROHIBITING THE DISAGGREGATION OF STUDENT DATA BY ETHNIC SUBGROUPS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL INFORMATION SYSTEM.

Good afternoon Co-Chairs Slossberg, Boucher and Fleishmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Angela Rola and I am providing testimony on behalf of the Asian Pacific American Coalition of Connecticut (APAC). APAC was established in 2008 as an organization dedicated to the betterment of the fastest growing ethnic group in Connecticut and the United States. APAC is run entirely by volunteers and focuses its efforts on a variety of areas including employment, housing, health, education, voting rights, and civil rights.

As leaders and community members from the diverse Asian American and Pacific Islander communities across the State of Connecticut, we oppose S.B. No. 359 and are deeply concerned by recent efforts in opposing the collection of detailed race, ethnicity, and language (REL) data in our state and elsewhere in the country.

We firmly believe that collecting and reporting detailed data for ethnic subgroups are essential in identifying and reducing the disparities experienced by underrepresented minority communities, especially in the areas of education, medical and mental health care, housing, employment, legal and social services. In Connecticut, over twenty different ethnic subgroups make up the state’s approximate 150,000 Asian American and Pacific Islander population. The incredibly diverse cultures, immigration histories, socio-economic compositions, and acculturation levels of these groups mean they have distinct experiences and social needs that cannot be seen when they are lumped under one racial category. Without high-quality and detailed data, policy makers, institutions, and providers misunderstand, overlook, under-fund, and ignore the needs of these growing and complex communities in policy and program decision making processes. This is especially pressing given the pervasive model minority myth, which stereotypes Asian Americans as a monolithic and self-sufficient racial group that is doing well across the board. Detailed data helps debunk the gross generalization of the model minority stereotype and enables public and private entities to better understand and address the challenges that different ethnic subgroups face.

AAPI policy makers, educators, community leaders, health and social service providers, and researchers have historically spearheaded the push for detailed data collection. Recent introductions and subsequent passages of detailed data collection bills specific to AAPI in California, Minnesota, Washington, Rhode Island, New York, and Massachusetts exemplify the fruition of such efforts. However, the pushback by some Asian Americans against detailed data collection in the past two years are also worth addressing. Comprising mostly of Chinese immigrants, these highly vocal opponents decry detailed Asian American data collection “discriminatory” and “racist.” Fearing potential “abuse” and “misuse” of such data, they deploy alarmist rhetoric that compares detailed Asian American data collection to the Nazis’ registry and isolation of Jews for genocide in Europe. They also allude that such data opens a “backdoor” for affirmative action in higher education and hinders their high-achieving children’s ability to get into universities, particularly elite institutions.
AAPI data experts and supporters of detailed data know that these claims are misleading and misguided. Such claims unfairly ignore the history of detailed data collection, misrepresent its goals and purposes, and disregard the desires of underrepresented minority subgroups. They also refuse to acknowledge how detailed data has instrumentally enhanced efforts to secure public and private resources to assist underrepresented minority communities in need. Regarding the argument that detailed data are linked to college admission discrimination against Asian Americans, it is important to underscore that Asian ethnicity data collected at the K-12 level are designed to “support parental engagement in ethnically diverse schools, and to provide better student support services on matters ranging from mental health and suicide prevention to successful college completion.” They are unrelated to elite institutions’ admission considerations. Lastly, those opposing detailed data due to fear of discrimination ironically overlook the fact that any concerted efforts to investigate and combat institutional discrimination and racism rely heavily on having access to detailed data.

Thus, contrary to those who oppose detailed data collection and reporting, we strongly believe that having detailed data will help uplift diverse AAPI and other communities across Connecticut. We are certain that high-quality and detailed data are critical in ensuring more equitable access and success for all groups.

Please vote against S.B. No. 359. We welcome further discussion and look forward to having an opportunity to be part of future conversations regarding race, ethnicity, and language (REL) data.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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